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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the outcomes of a study that surveyed charter school principals and special education directors in Colorado to determine their attitudes about charter school services for students with special needs, to determine how charter schools fund special education services, and to create a data-based foundation for making recommendations. Study results suggest that the number of students and the proportion of students with an Individualized Education Program have increased for charter schools over the past four years, causing an increasing strain on both the charter schools and the support provided by the districts. Charter school administrators indicated that their plans to offer additional services to students with disabilities are limited, likely due to limited resources. Most charter schools did not have a specific plan in place when they were chartered to comply with laws related to educating students with disabilities. The majority of principals felt a lack of control or minimal control as related to hiring special services providers in their schools and are generally dissatisfied with the financial arrangements that they have with their school districts. In contrast, most directors were satisfied with the financial arrangements they have with their charter schools. Recommendations are provided. Appended are: Letter Requesting Survey Participation; Charter Administrator Survey; Special Education Director Survey; Letter Requesting Focus Group Participation; and Focus Group Participation-Discussion Outline. (Contains 12 references, 3 tables, and 20 figures.) (CR)

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SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES IN COLORADO CHARTER SCHOOLS:

Surveying Perceptions of Charter School Administrators and Special Education Directors

March, 2002

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following study was sponsored by the Colorado Department of Education. The purpose of the study was to survey charter school principals and special education directors in the state of Colorado to determine attitudes and perceptions of charter school administrators and district special education directors about charter school services for students with special education needs, to determine how charter schools in Colorado reportedly fund delivery of special education services to their students, and to create a data-based foundation for making recommendations for the improvement of Colorado charter schools as to how they meet the needs of students with special education needs who attend them.

The study was initiated in January 2001 and the draft report was submitted in December 2001. The final report was released in spring, 2002. Two surveys were developed, one for charter school principals and one for special education district directors; the surveys were comprised of 26 and 25 questions, respectively. In addition, focus groups were conducted in two locations in Colorado, one at each site for charter school principals and a second for special education directors. Focus groups were ninety minutes in duration and sessions were organized around discussion of nine questions and two group activities. Letters requesting participation in completing the surveys on-line and requesting attendance at one of the focus groups, were sent to all charter school principals and all directors of special education in the state of Colorado. Response rates for the surveys were 52.2 percent and 64.6 percent for special education directors and charter school principals, respectively. Focus groups were comprised of from five to nine participants.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and transcripts of utterances from the focus group sessions were analyzed for common themes. Results of the study suggest that the number of students and the proportion of students with an individualized education program have increased for charter schools over the past four years causing an increasing strain on both the charter schools and the support provided by the districts. Projections suggest that this trend will continue, highlighting the importance of addressing issues which impede a collaborative and enabling relationship between charter schools and school districts so that the needs of students with disabilities can be adequately met. One-third of charter school administrators recognize that their schools are not attractive to parents of children with disabilities. Charter school administrators surveyed indicated that their plans to offer additional services to students with disabilities are limited, likely due to limited resources. Most charter schools do not have a specific plan in place when they are chartered to comply with laws related to educating students with disabilities. Since most charters prefer serving students with special education needs in the regular classroom to other service delivery options, it is likely that the lack of planning and the lack of options as to service delivery affect the extent to which the needs of students with disabilities are being met in charter schools.

The bulk of district special education funds are passed to the charter schools, including both IDEA funds (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and state funds. There is, however, a perception that funds that are passed on as services are not perceived as "funds" in the same way that cash monies are perceived as funds. As related to financial relationships with their districts, most charter schools use an insurance model wherein they pay a flat rate to the district for provision of specific services to their students with disabilities. Other charters combine an insurance model with contracting for some services directly with service providers. A majority of charter school principals report feeling a lack of control or minimal control as related to hiring special services providers in their schools and are generally dissatisfied with the financial arrangement they have with their school districts. In contrast, most special education directors are satisfied with the financial arrangement they have with their charter schools. In spite of overall satisfaction with their financial relationship with charters, special education directors report that 25 percent of their charters are partially or totally inadequate in terms of serving the needs of students with disabilities. In addition, 70 percent of special education directors report a supportive, positive relationship between their district and the charter schools within them, while only 10 percent of the charter school principals report a positive relationship. Thus, there is a major lack of awareness of each other's perspective as regards the relationship between the charters and the sponsoring districts. Charter school principals and special education directors share the impression that charter school personnel do not understand their legal responsibilities to students with disabilities and both parties would like to ameliorate this lack of knowledge.

Recommendations suggested by the data include improving communication between charter schools and their districts, requiring charters to submit a detailed plan for serving the needs of students with disabilities when they are seeking a charter, greater availability of support materials for charter schools related to legal compliance, clarification of funding issues for charter schools to avoid conflicts with school districts, and identifying and empowering a liaison agency to provide technical assistance to charters in legal compliance and provision of quality services to students in special education. The Colorado Charter School Special Education Advisory Committee will give additional recommendations.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT

Purpose:

The purpose of the study was to fulfill the following objectives: (1) Determine how charter schools in Colorado reportedly deliver special education services to their students, (2) Determine how charter schools in Colorado reportedly fund delivery of special education services to their students, (3) Determine attitudes and perceptions of charter school administrators and district special education directors about the nature and quality of charter school services for students with special education needs, and (4) Make recommendations for improvement for Colorado charter schools as related to meeting the needs of students with special education needs.

Background: Special Education and Charter Schools:

Charter schools began to appear as an option among American traditional public schools in the early 1990's as a response to the call for school reform and school choice nationwide. The first law permitting the opening of charter schools was passed in Minnesota in 1991 and the first charter school opened in the 1992-93 school year. Since then, 38 states have passed laws allowing the formation of charter schools, schools where teachers, parents, community groups, business leaders, or others may open new public schools or convert existing schools, with varying degrees of independence from established school districts (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2000). According to the Center for Education Reform, nationwide there are currently approximately 2,400 charter schools operating in 34 states and the District of Columbia, serving over 550,000 students, an increase of nearly 12 percent as compared with the 2000-2001 school year.

One of the formidable challenges facing charter schools is the responsibility of these schools to provide education to students with disabilities. Charter schools must comply with all federal civil rights laws including all laws related to the education of students with disabilities: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the American's with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA (re-authorized in 1997). These laws specify both actions that are prohibited and actions that must be taken to guarantee specific rights of individuals with disabilities, particularly related to education.

Several studies have been funded by the United States Department of Education to focus on special education in charter schools. A two-year study (1997, 1998) funded through the Charter Schools Office under Title X of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, studied 32 charter schools to investigate ways in which they are meeting the needs of students with disabilities (Fiore & Cashman, 1998; Fiore, Warren, & Cashman, 1999). Project SEARCH (Special Education as Requirements in Charter Schools), a field-initiated study, was funded by the Office of Special Education. Project SEARCH is especially relevant to Colorado in that it incorporated a case study of Colorado as one of the seven states it reviewed. Project SEARCH asked the question, "What policies and practices facilitate the capacity of charter schools to provide special education services to

their students who require them?" The results of the study may be found at www.nasdse.org/project_search.htm.

Charter Schools and Colorado:

The Colorado Charter Schools Act was enacted in 1993 to provide greater choice and diversity in the Colorado public schools. During the 2000 school year, 79 charter schools were in operation with an enrollment statewide of 20,155 students, representing 2.8 percent of the statewide K-12 student population. In addition, most recent currently available figures suggest that 1,114 students with disabilities were being served in Colorado charter schools in the 1998-1999 school year, representing 8.0 percent of charter school students, contrasted with 65,734 students with disabilities in all public schools in the state, representing 9.6 percent (www.ed.gov/pubs/charter4thyear/c3.html).

The law in Colorado specifies the relationship between charter schools and special education as being consistent with a total link state, meaning there is a formal linkage established in the statute that links charter schools and the local educational agency in all areas of special education (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2000). This means that the school district of residence is ultimately responsible for legal compliance of charter schools in the area of special education. However, since each charter school must develop a plan to serve students with disabilities and negotiate the specifics of this plan with their school district, there is variability in the division of responsibility for meeting the needs of these children. At issue is how well the needs of children requiring special education are being met in charter schools in Colorado, who is servicing these students, and what can be learned about models that work best by surveying and interviewing charter school administrators and special education directors.

Timeline for the Current Study:

Representatives from the Colorado Department of Education met with the consultants in mid-January, 2001 to discuss the purpose and objectives of the proposed study. It was decided that two surveys would be developed for distribution to two groups: all charter school administrators in the state of Colorado (79) and all directors of special education or their representatives (40) who serve charter schools. In addition, focus groups would be conducted one south and one north of the Denver-metro area. A group of charter school administrators and special education directors would participate in a focus group at each location.

Survey questions were developed in the spring of 2001, with input from a number of sources to establish validity and internal reliability. Specifically, four experts in the field of charter schools who would not be completing the survey or participating in the focus groups, reviewed the questions for validity. The surveys were then piloted with eight individuals familiar with charter schools and the results analyzed for internal reliability. The surveys were posted on the Colorado Department of Education web site in April, 2001 (see Appendix A) and a letter was sent early in May, 2001, to each charter school

principal and each special education director, encouraging their participation in the survey (See Appendix B).

In May 2001, focus group interviews were conducted in Colorado Springs and Longmont, Colorado, one at each site for charter school principals and a second for special education directors. Letters of invitation were sent to all charter school principals and all special education directors in the state of Colorado (see Appendix E). Transcripts from the focus groups were analyzed in May and survey data were received in May, September, and October. Survey data were analyzed in November 2001 and the report was prepared in November-December, 2001.

PART TWO: METHODOLOGY

Two distinct research methods were chosen to fulfill the purpose of the study. The first was a survey instrument and the second was focus group interviews. Both methods had two versions to target charter school administrators and special education directors.

The surveys were comprised of 26 questions for Charter School Principals or their representatives, and a second survey, comprised of 25 questions, was developed for special education directors or their representatives. The first several questions in the surveys requested demographic information including identifying information, size of the district, number of charter schools in the district, date of the first charter in the district, and other related items. The remaining questions requested funding information and information about provision of services to students with disabilities in charter schools in Colorado.

All subjects were sent a letter to request their participation (see Appendix B). Responses were coded to preserve anonymity. The first request for responses was sent early in May 2001. The consultant attended a state charter school meeting in spring, 2001, and again requested participation of charter school principals and special education directors. In October 2001, all non-respondents were additionally contacted by telephone to request their participation. Response rates were 52.5 percent for the special education directors and 64.6 percent for the charter school administrators (see Appendix C). Sufficient returns were available to support a 95 percent confidence level in the estimates from the administrator survey and a 90 percent confidence level in the estimates from the special education director survey. It must be recognized that the study is based neither on a random sample, nor necessarily on a representative sample, since participants completed the surveys and participated in the focus groups as volunteers.

In addition to the surveys, four focus groups were conducted to elicit elaborated responses from charter school administrators and special education directors on issues affecting special education services in charter schools (see Appendix D). To accommodate participants in varying locations in Colorado, one session for charter school principals or their representatives, and one session for special education directors or their representatives was held at each of two locations, Colorado Springs and

Longmont, Colorado, south and north of the Denver-metro area. Ninety-minute sessions consisted of three distinct activities as described below:

1. Welcome: The facilitator explained the purpose of the focus group, discussed the ground rules, and assured anonymity and confidentiality. Each participant was assigned a number so that each time an individual spoke, he/she was to identify him/herself by number.

2. Ratings and Phrases Activity: On an index card, participants wrote down a word or phrase that described their impression of charter school's reactions to children with special education needs. Below the word or phrase, participants used a one to five numerical scale to rate their satisfaction with the charter schools in meeting the needs of the children with disabilities (1=low, 5 = high). All participants reported out to the group with their word or phrase and numerical rating (see Appendix G).

3. Open-Ended Questions: The facilitator posed a series of focused, open-ended questions, one at a time, to the group (see Appendix D). The questions sought to uncover deeper and richer information to augment the survey results.

4. Small Group Consensus Activity: The facilitator separated the participants into groups of three or four. Each small group brainstormed the strengths and weaknesses of the relationship between charter schools and children with special education needs. Participants were then asked to come to consensus within their respective groups on the top three strengths and three most troubling weaknesses (see Appendix H). This activity was completed in writing.

5. Wrap Up and Closing: The facilitator closed the session by opening the floor for final participant remarks and comments. The facilitator then thanked the participants and assured them that a final report would be forthcoming.

A letter was sent to all special education directors and charter school principals in the state of Colorado, inviting them to participate in one of the focus groups (see Appendix E). Table 1 below indicates the number of participants for each focus group and the number of schools represented by the participants (see also Appendix F).

Focus Group Location/Type	Number of Participants	Number of Schools Represented
Southern Charter School Administrators	5	4
Southern Special Education Directors	6	13
Northern Charter School Administrators	9	5
Northern Special Education Directors	7	33

Table 1. Focus Group participants

PART THREE: SURVEY ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Respondents to the survey were asked to describe their title and to identify the school district in which their charter school resides. Figure 1 depicts the titles represented by the subjects in this study. The list of school districts represented appears in Appendix C.

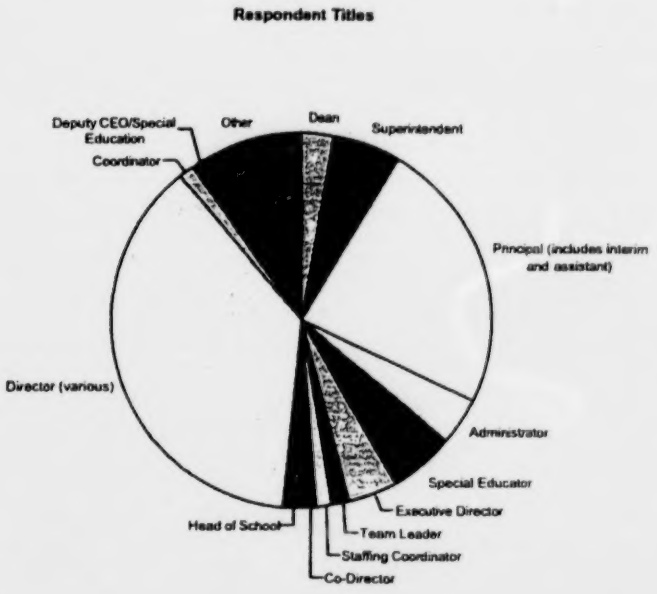

Figure 1. Titles of Survey Respondents.

The districts described by these respondents had a mean number of students of 7322.86 and an average of 2.59 charter schools per district. Figure 2 depicts the number of charter schools that opened per year from 1993 through 2000. The schools represented all grade levels, with K-8 the most frequent. Enrollment in charter schools has also grown each year. Enrollment trends are shown in Figure 3.

The respondents were asked to report the number of students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and the percent of students in an "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act" (IDEA) category. On average, 12.85 percent of students were classified in an IDEA category. Administrators were also asked to categorize their students as gifted, above average, average, or struggling. The distribution of responses in these categories appears in Figure 4.

Figure 5 shows the percentage of students with an IEP, both at entry and after entry, from 1997 to the present.

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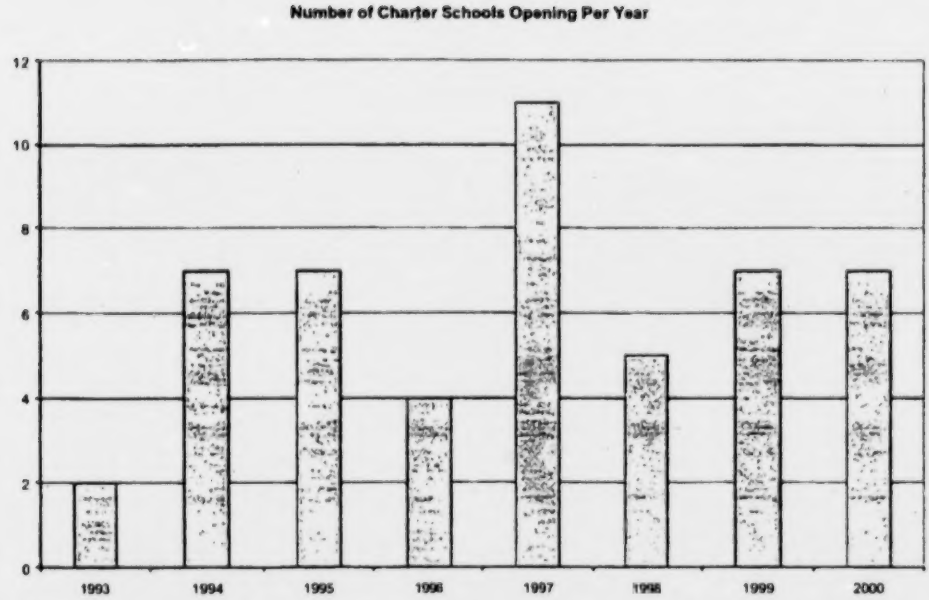

Figure 2. Number of Charter School Openings by Year.

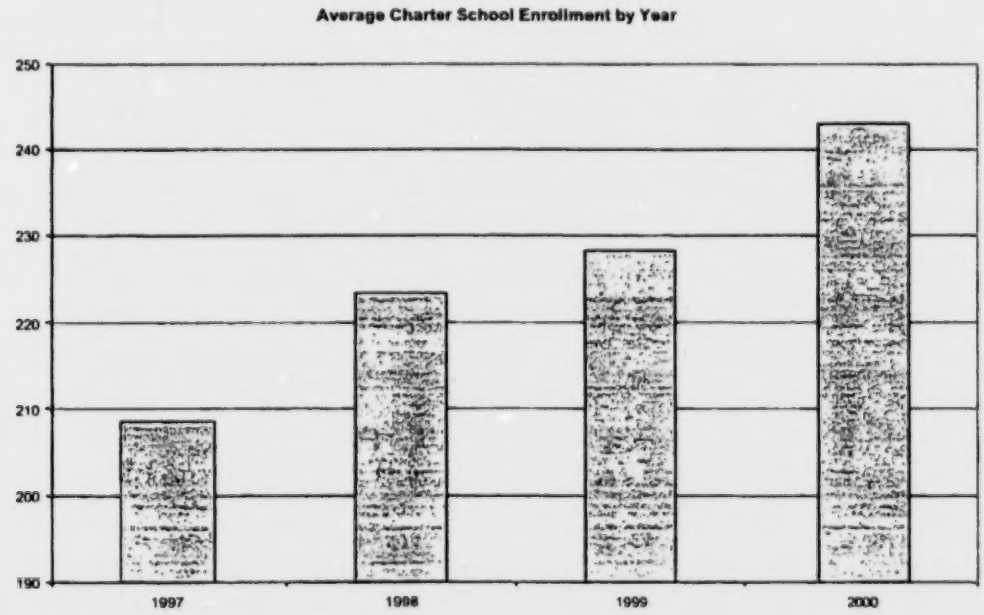

Figure 3. Charter School Enrollment Trends

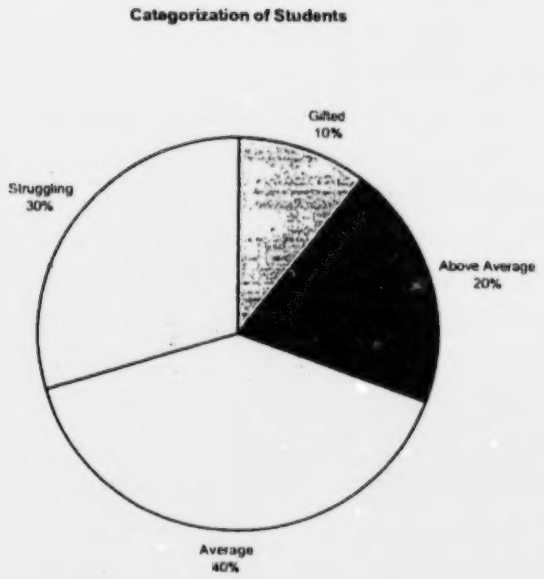

Figure 4. Categorization of Charter School Students

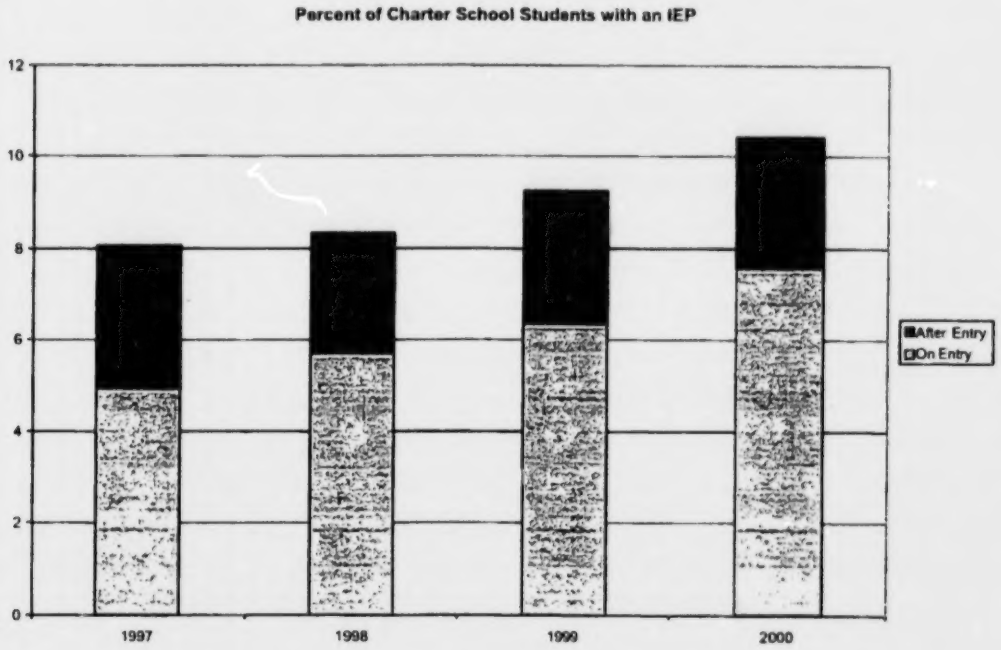

Figure 5. Percent of Charter School Students with an IEP

There is a significant amount of variation among charter schools in the number of students with an IEP either upon or after entry. Table 2 depicts the range of numbers of students with an identified IEP in each school. Evaluation of the mean relative to the range indicates that some schools have a disproportionate number of students with an IEP. Overall, students identified as having special education needs in Colorado represent about 11% of the public school population, suggesting that reported numbers of children in this study on IEPs in charter schools in Colorado are greater than in the public school population as a whole.

	Number of Students with IEP *At Entry* (Range)	Mean	Number of Students with IEP *After Entry* (Range)	Mean
1997	0-34	10.34	0-28	6.47
1998	0-50	12.77	0-34	5.83
1999	0-53	14.49	0-36	6.63
2000	0-67	18.39	0-40	6.91

Table 2. Range of percent of charter school students on an IEP both on and after entry

The students with an IEP were further categorized relative to their particular needs. The specific needs of these students are depicted in Figure 6.

The charter school administrators were asked to describe their school's attractiveness to parents of children with disabilities. A summary of the responses to this question is shown in Figure 7.

Charter school administrators reported a variety of efforts to attract special needs students to charter schools. Most commonly (78 percent), community meetings were used to inform local parents of the services charter schools could offer students with special needs. Seventy four percent of the administrators reported using advertising, 62 percent used district referrals, and 42 percent used school literature or brochures to inform parents of their capacity. Only 30 percent of the charter school applications ask parents to identify the existence of a disability, and the most common use of this information is for data collection (84 percent), followed by use as a basis for a parent conference (54 percent), and lastly, to prepare for teacher conferences (46 percent).

According to the survey, nearly two-thirds of students who need support require only mild classroom support, 11.56 percent require moderate classroom support, and 8.68 require significant classroom support. Eighty-four percent of the charter school administrators reported having a functioning pre-referral team to suggest solutions for learning or behavior challenges a student may be having and to monitor the success of potential solutions prior to considering referral for special education eligibility testing. Charter school administrators reported a range of activity for the pre-referral teams, one to five meetings per year being the most common.

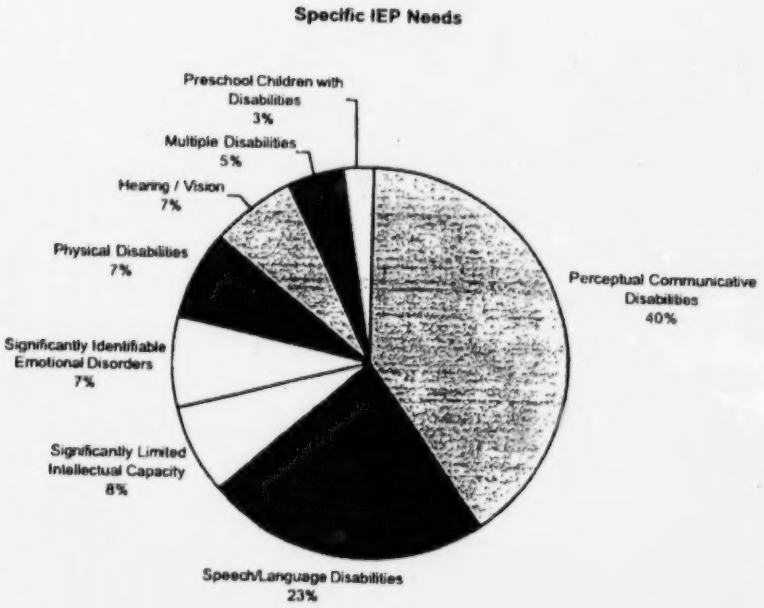

Figure 6. Specific IEP Needs

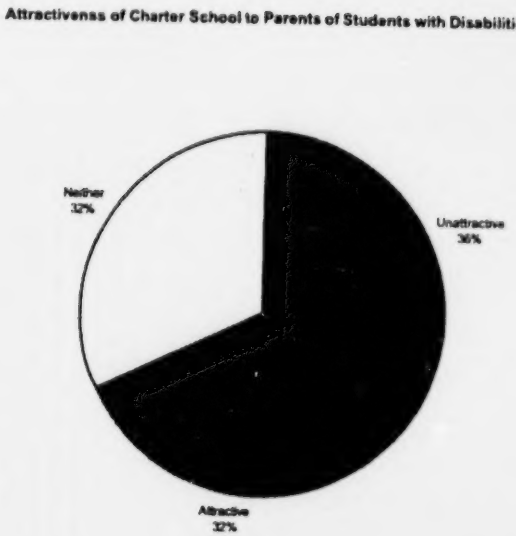

Figure 7. Perceived Attractiveness of Charter Schools to Parents of Students with Disabilities

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The charter school administrators reported that less than half of charter school charters specify how students with disabilities will be served (45.1 percent) even though a variety of services for special needs children were either currently offered or were in the planning stages. Figure 8 reports the percent of respondents who indicated that they offer, plan to offer, or do not plan to offer these common services for special needs children.

Charter schools secure services for students with disabilities in a variety of ways. The most prevalent methods of securing services include the insurance model, contracting with independent providers, and a combination of the two. Special education directors reported that, of those schools participating in the insurance model, 53.3 percent were mandated to provide services in this way.

Figure 9 shows the frequency with which these charter schools use each mechanism to secure services. Sixty-five percent of the districts charge the charter schools $500 to $599 per pupil for special education services and another twenty-five percent charge $200 to $299.

Services come from many sources. Charter schools provide some services internally, the district is relied upon to provide services, and additional services are contracted. Charter schools receive the majority of special services through the district. Only a small proportion of schools contract independently for services, and when they do, most (52.4 percent) must sustain the full cost of the contracted service. Figure 10 shows the source of each special service.

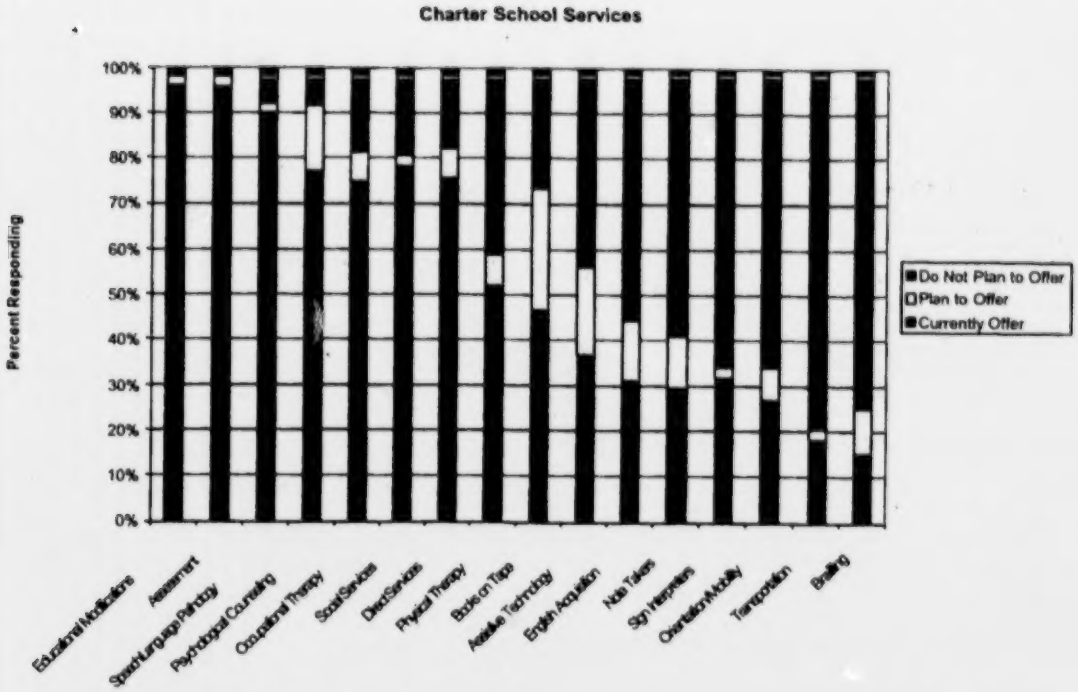

Figure 8. Charter School Services (current and planned)

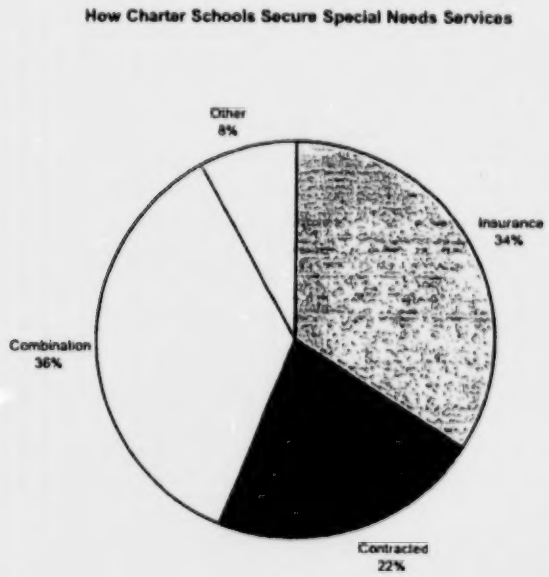

Figure 9. How Charter Schools Secure Special Needs Services

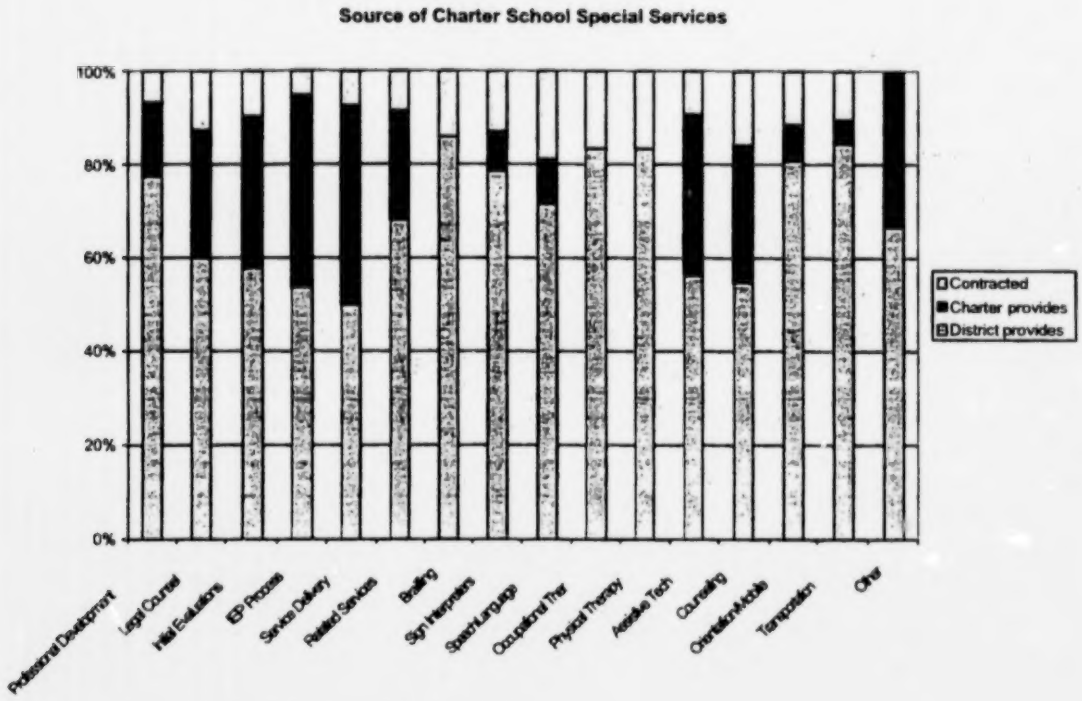

Figure 10. Source of Charter School Special Services.

Of the special education director respondents, 66.7 percent reported that the district provided technical assistance to charter schools in specific areas. Most often, this assistance is in the area of legal compliance (61.9 percent) followed by IEP development (52.4 percent), discipline (47.6 percent) and manifestation determination reviews (47.6 percent).

Even with the variety of services directly and indirectly available to the charter schools, special education directors perceive that less than 10 percent of charter schools are *totally adequate* in meeting the needs of special needs children.

Figure 11 shows perception of special education directors regarding the adequacy of charter schools in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

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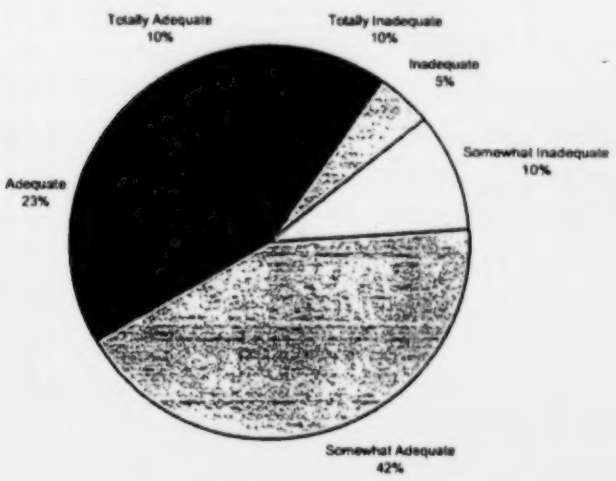

Figure 11. Adequacy of Charter Schools in Meeting the Needs of Students with Disabilities.

Problems in non-compliance with legal requirements for addressing special needs children are identified in a variety of ways. Special education directors reported that the majority of problems are identified through regular contact in meetings with the charter schools (55 percent). Another 40 percent are identified via parental complaints with five percent identified via mediation.

When non-compliance is identified, the special education directors reported a variety of mechanisms for dealing with the issue. Most commonly, staff support is provided to mediate the problem (71.4 percent), followed by consulting services (23.8 percent), with reprimand a minority response (14.3 percent).

For nearly half of the special education directors who responded to the survey, (47.6 percent) documentation of legal compliance is part of the charter renewal process, but documentation is part of the initial charter in only 28.6 percent of the districts. For almost a quarter (23.8 percent) of the districts, documentation is not part of the charter initiation or renewal process. These proportions are shown in Figure 12. When documentation is required, the type of documentation is nearly evenly split between implicit required, meaning embedded in more general documentation and thus less detailed, and explicitly required and delineated as part of the process. Special education directors are involved in the actual documentation and renewal process 55 percent of the time.

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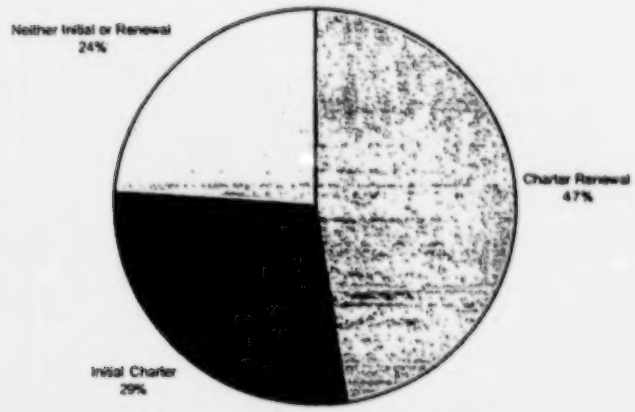

Figure 12. Requirements for Documentation of Compliance.

There is a wide range of mechanisms for providing services in the classroom, as well as variation in the level of staffing provided by the charter school. The most prevalent mechanisms for providing services to students with disabilities are in the general classroom. Seventy percent of respondents indicated that general education teachers meet the needs of children with disabilities, and 79.4 percent reported that general education teachers provide services after consulting with special education teachers.

Methods outside of the general education classroom are less frequent. Charter school administrators identified the methods used in their schools. Figure 13 shows the percentage of students served via a variety of service delivery models.

The average caseload per full time equivalent (FTE) position varies from school to school. Figure 14 depicts the average caseload per FTE reported by charter school administrators for the special education staff in their school. This includes special education teachers, paraprofessionals, and related professionals.

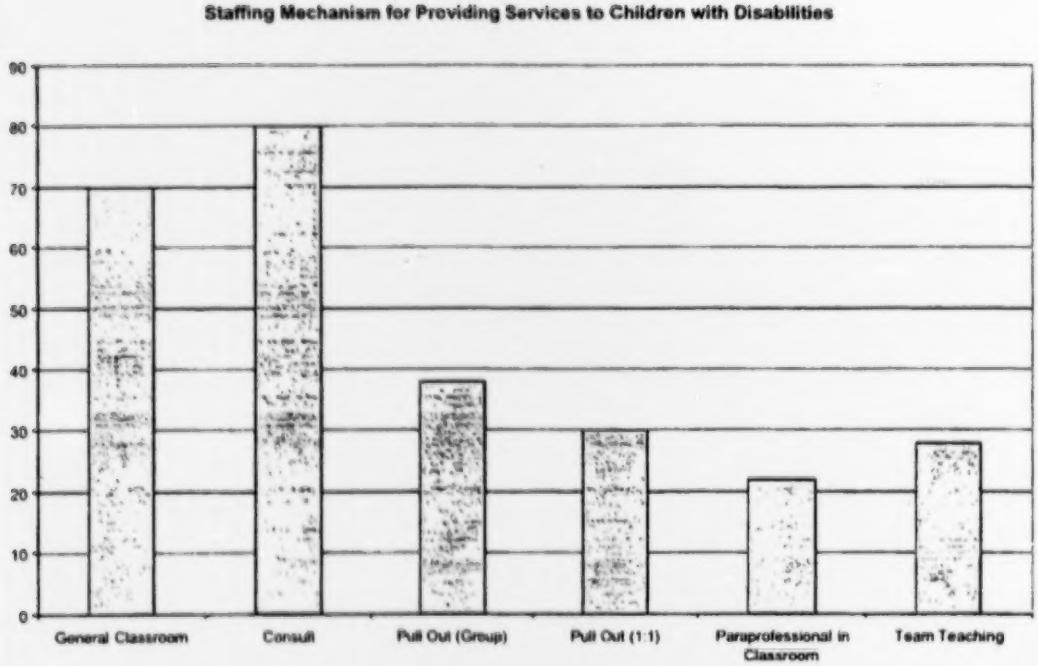

Figure 13. Percentage of schools using various staffing mechanisms for providing services to children with disabilities

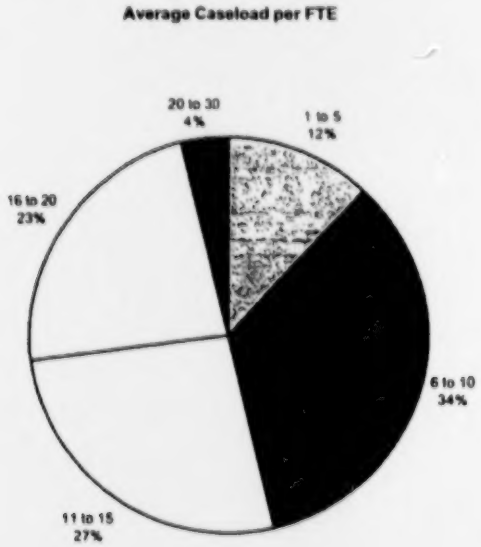

Figure 14. Average Caseload per FTE

Only a minority of charter school administrators feels as though they have total control over the hiring decisions relative to special education staff with almost a quarter feeling as if they have no control. Figure 15 depicts the charter school administrators' perceived level of control over hiring decisions for special education staff.

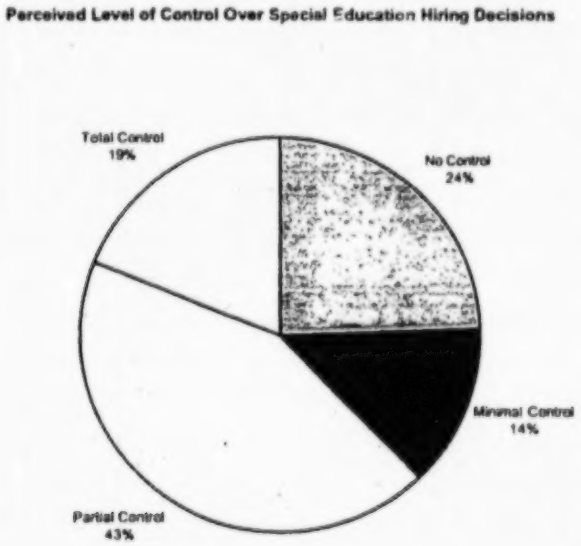

Figure 15. Perceived level of control over special education hiring decisions

As related to funding issues, Special Education Directors were asked to describe the funding procedures used when district special education funds are provided to the charter schools. Figure 16 categorizes the percentage of district's education funding that is passed directly to charter schools in the district for the fiscal year on a per pupil basis (PPR). Twenty-five per cent of the Special Education Directors reported that 99 to 100 percent of special education funds were passed directly to charter schools, with an additional 43.8 percent reporting that 95 to 96 percent of funds were passed directly. IDEA funds were forwarded to charter schools as reported by 47.6 percent of the special education directors. The form of these funds was varied, with 40 percent reporting that cash funds were sent directly to the schools. Figure 17 identifies the forms in which IDEA funds were reported as sent to the charter schools. The types of technical assistance provided to the charter schools by the district varied from district to district, with 53 percent providing IEP development, 47 percent providing discipline assistance, 47 percent providing help with manifestation determination reviews, and 63 percent providing assistance with legal compliance.

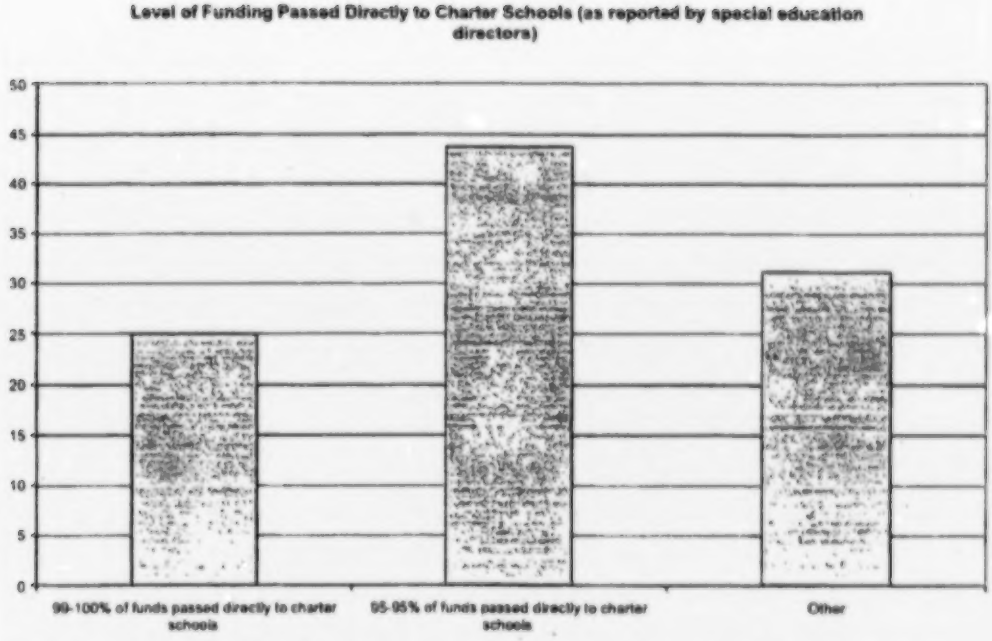

Figure 16: Percent of special education directors reporting level of funding passed directly to charter schools.

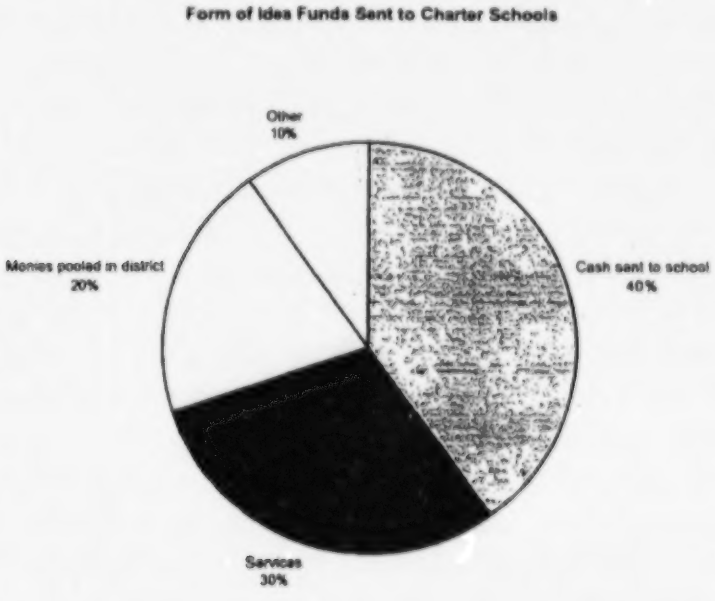

Figure 17: Form of IDEA funds sent to charter schools.

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38.1 percent of special education directors reported that state special education funds were passed through to charter schools. Table 3 represents how the amounts of pass through are determined. Of the special education directors responding, 23.8 percent reported that administrative costs were included in the withheld funds, and conversely, 76.2 percent indicated that administrative costs were not included in the funds withheld.

Method	Percent
In Year Head Count	25%
Prior Year Head Count	37.5%
Some Other Metric	37.5%

Table 3: Method of determining amount of state funds passed through

As reflected in Figure 18, 37 percent of district special education directors report that all charter schools participate in the insurance model to provide services to students with disabilities. Twenty-one percent of special education directors report that some schools participate in the insurance model, while the majority (42 percent) reported that none of the schools in their district participate in this way.

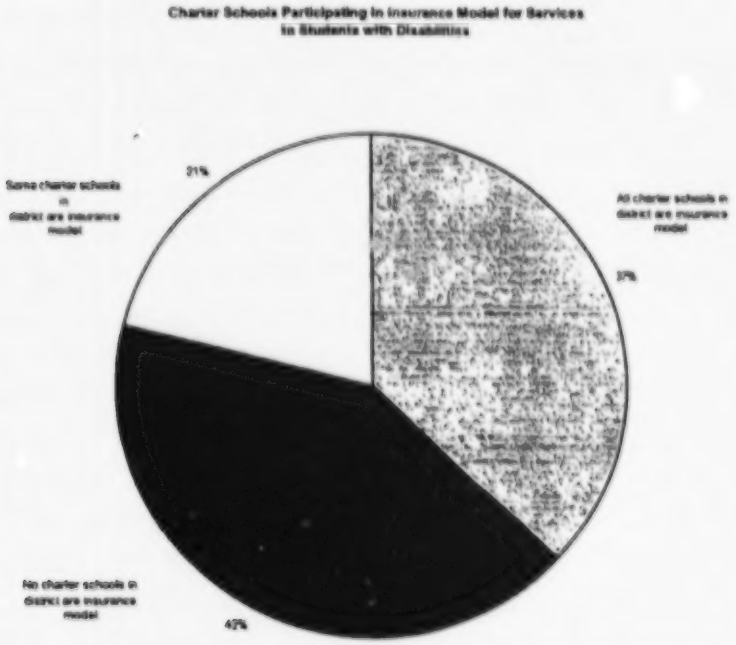

Figure 18. Percentage of schools in districts using insurance model

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In only two districts did special education directors report that funding varies from charter school to charter school within the district. Funding ranged from an average minimum of $37,735 to an average maximum of $154,250 per school. Administrative costs are withheld by the district 23.8 percent of the time.

When asked about the effect of funding on the quality of special education services, 38 percent of charter school administrators reported that funding has a negative effect on the quality of services offered by their school. Twenty-eight percent reported that funding had a positive effect, while 34 percent were neutral on this issue. When asked about their satisfaction with mechanisms for funding special education, only 37 percent were satisfied. Special Education Directors, on the other hand, expressed somewhat more satisfaction with the mechanisms for funding special education. Figure 19 shows the distribution of responses for both groups.

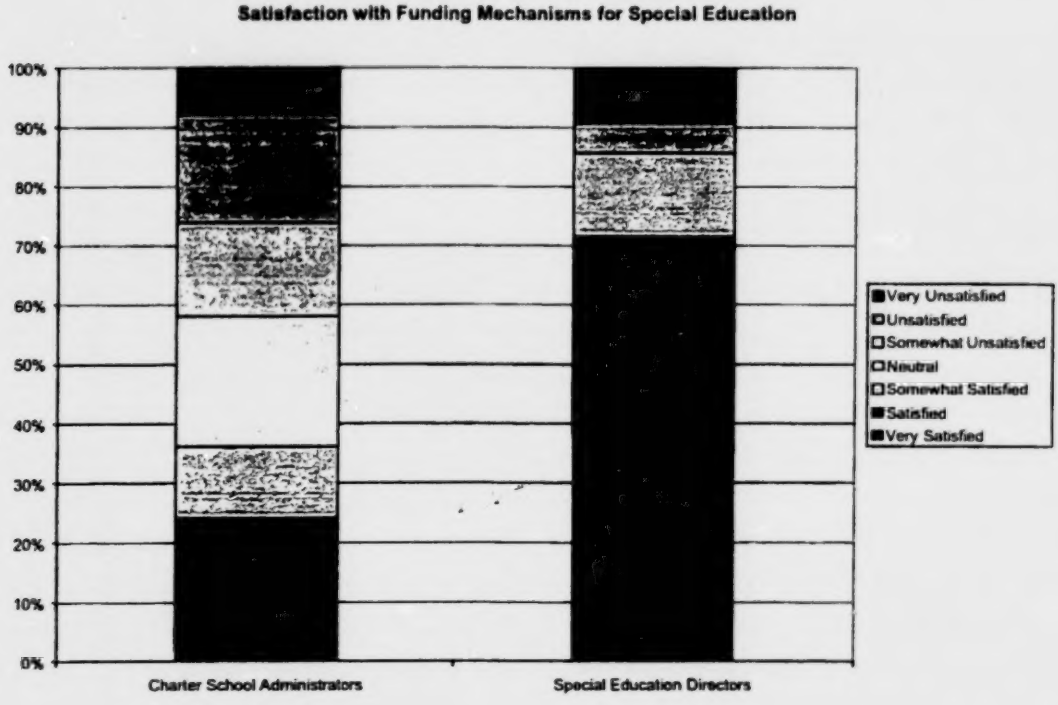

Figure 19. Satisfaction with Funding Mechanism

While charter school administrators and special education directors were similar in reporting figures, such as those relative to types of services and funding options, there were important distinctions between the two groups when reporting on the nature of the relationship between the district and the charter schools. When asked to describe the nature of this relationship, charter school administrators reported a somewhat strained relationship while special education directors reported a mostly supportive relationship. Figure 20 shows the distribution of responses for the two groups

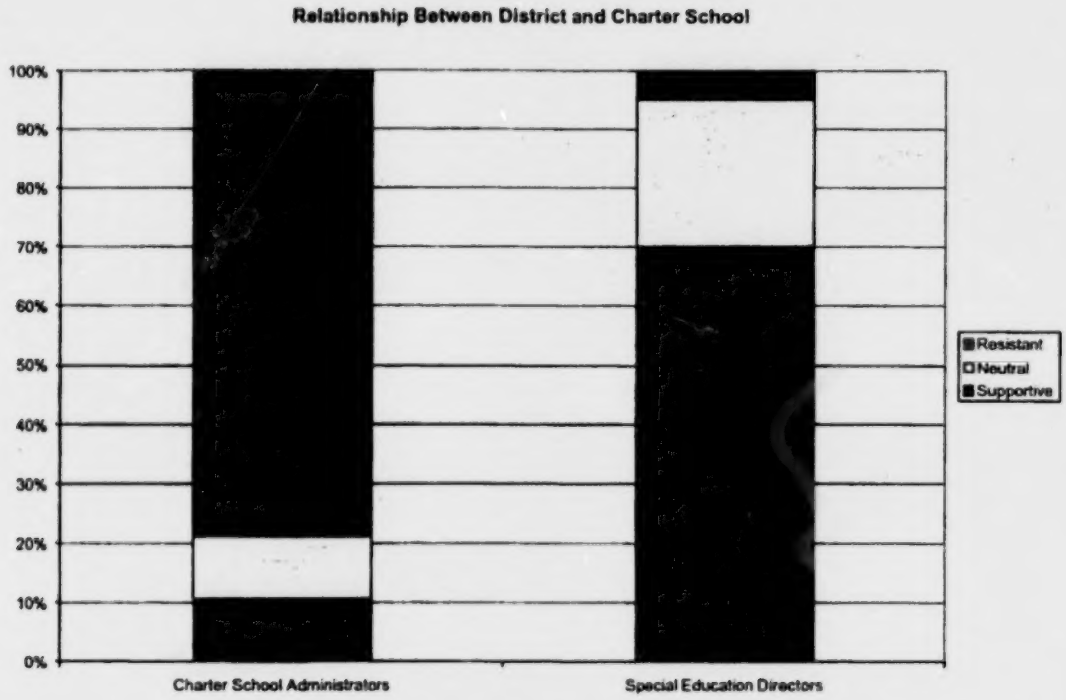

Figure 20. Relationship Between District and Charter School

PART FOUR: FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

As stated previously, focus group interviews were used to elicit in-depth comments from both charter school administrators and special education directors regarding their perceptions of services to students with disabilities in charter schools in Colorado.

During the index card activity, participants were asked to rate how well charter schools were able to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Overall, charter school administrators were more satisfied with the charter school's ability to meet the needs of children with disabilities than special education directors. The average rating provided by charter school administrators was 3.9 (on a 5 point scale), while the average rating by special education directors was 2.9. When asked to supply a word or phrase describing charter school's reaction to students with special education needs, representative words for charter school administrators were generally positive. In contrast, special education directors were generally negative. The actual ratings and words and phrases appear in Appendix G.

During the small group consensus activity, participants were asked to identify and rank the top three strengths and weaknesses of the relationship between charter schools and

students with special needs. Strengths identified by both groups include the sense of a shared mission or shared practices and the opportunity for educational choices. As related to weaknesses, special education directors noted that charter schools exhibited a lack of knowledge about special education laws, requirements, and practices. The charter school administrators indicated poor relationships with the districts and problems associated with funding were most prominent. The charts in Appendix H are color-coded to show common perceptions among participants.

Transcripts from the focus group interviews may be found in Appendix I. Repeating themes from the transcripts of charter school administrators include an admission that charter school administrators are not well informed as to legal issues or policies and procedures related to serving the needs of children with disabilities, and a desire for more information in these areas. Secondly, charter school administrators frequently cited frustration with the sense that due to their lack of knowledge, negotiations with districts are often confusing. This confusion sets up the perception of unfairness by the districts, as every situation appears to uncover new issues and different standards of responsibility. Due to a lack of knowledge coming into the process of negotiating with districts regarding special education, charter school administrators cannot anticipate potential scenarios and thus do not know what questions to ask during negotiations. Thus, they are often faced with unforeseen situations they perceive place them in a position of disadvantage in terms of the cost and quality of services. Third, charter school administrators voiced a desire for the Colorado Department of Education to assume a liaison role in chartering charter schools. There is the sense that there needs to be an impartial entity through which the funds pass and an entity that provides more systematic and thorough training prior to and during negotiating a charter. Finally, charter school administrators expressed a need for a mechanism for networking among special education service providers in charter schools in order to share information and expertise, and also a need for more equitable funding. A number of charter school administrators suggested that if school district administrators would visit charter schools and observe their programs, there would be a better foundation for a positive relationship between the charters and the school districts.

Repeating themes voiced by the special education directors included a perception that many charter schools have an attitude of superiority, which negatively affects the entire relationship with the school district. Specifically, this attitude affects communication and sends a message of preferred isolation, which is inconsistent with the "total-link," legally mandated relationship between charter schools and school districts in the state of Colorado. Further, since legislation in Colorado uses conversion to charter school status as one consequence of continuing unsatisfactory academic performance of students within schools, the school districts perceive charter schools as an indication of failure and the charter schools perceive themselves as holding an advantage over the school districts. This reality results in a polarization between the two entities, which influences negotiations, and interactions between charter schools and school districts. A second theme relates to the perceived ignorance of charter school administrators by special education directors. Charter school personnel are perceived as not understanding their legal responsibilities as regards serving the needs of students with disabilities. Because

of this perceived lack of knowledge, special education directors feel that the assistance they can provide is insufficient to establish an adequate knowledge base. The high turnover of staff in charter schools further complicates the ability of school districts and special education directors to develop a sufficient knowledge base. Special education directors also voiced frustration with the incompatibility of the reality that they are legally responsible for compliance, while charter schools are encouraged to try out options for serving the needs of their students, including those with disabilities. Because of the legal exposure of the districts, special education directors resist creative options, while charters are encouraged to generate them. Special education directors, like charter school administrators, expressed frustration at the lack of financial resources and indicated that the more charter schools open in their districts, the greater the financial and resource strain. Finally, special education directors frequently described the importance of schools being willing to make accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities, wording that comes out of special education law, while charter school personnel seem to equate accommodating and modifying as compromising their missions which are often related to academic rigor. This is a fundamental difference in philosophy and again, reflects, in part, a lack of familiarity with special education law.

PART FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that participation in the surveys and focus group interviews was voluntary, these results may not be generalizable to all charter schools in Colorado. However, a wide variety of school districts were represented among the respondents suggesting that the findings may be useful as a basis for improvements in how charter schools meet the needs of children with disabilities in Colorado. In addition, the two methodologies used in the current study, surveys and focus group interviews, revealed similar trends, thus adding validity to the findings.

Several trends are evident from a review of the data. Both the number of students and the proportion of students with an individualized education program have increased for charter schools over the past four years, causing an additional strain on both the charter schools and the support provided by the districts. Projections suggest that this trend will continue, highlighting the importance of addressing issues impeding a collaborative and enabling relationship between charter schools and school districts toward better serving the needs of students with disabilities.

In serving special needs students, charter schools appear to be enrolling the largest number in the categories of perceptual communicative disorders and speech/language disabilities, consistent with their traditional public school counterparts. Fully one-third of charter school administrators recognize that their schools are not attractive to parents of children with disabilities. Since public schools are mandated by law to serve the needs of all students, this is a significant issue where charter schools need to move beyond awareness to improving their reputation among parents of children with disabilities and commensurate services. In questioning charter schools about their plans to offer a range of services to support children with disabilities, aspirations appear to be limited, suggesting that these schools do not plan to significantly increase current services.

However, in categories where they do plan to increase services, use of technology appears to be preferable, such as increasing assistive technology and books on tape. It may be that these changes are preferable due to their lessened requirements for teacher involvement.

The most prevalent service delivery model is consult and general classroom placement and caseloads appear to be within reasonable and legal ranges, similar to or more desirable than those in traditional public schools. Thus, perhaps with a more highly specified plan in place, it is likely that charter schools could improve services or the perception of improved services to students with disabilities, if they are lacking or perceived to be lacking. Areas where charter schools take more responsibility include development of individualized education programs, diagnostic evaluations, counseling, and incorporation of assistive technology.

As related to financial arrangements, most schools reportedly use an insurance or combination model, with less than one-quarter contracting completely for their own special education services. Insurance model schools pay their districts an agreed upon amount in exchange for specified services for students with disabilities. In addition, they may contract directly with outside service providers for other services required to serve the needs of children with disabilities. Across all special education services listed, charter schools appear generally to rely heavily on the school districts for provision of services. When asked about satisfaction with their current funding model, there appears to be a large difference between charter school administrators and special education directors. Eighty-seven percent of special education directors reported being satisfied with the current funding model while less than 40 percent of charter school administrators were similarly satisfied.

Overall, special education directors reported that 25 percent of charter schools are somewhat to totally inadequate as regards meeting the needs of students with disabilities. This is a troubling finding in that, at a minimum, the relationship between the charters and the school districts is likely affected by this perception, and it also may actually reflect compromised quality of services to a large number of students with special needs in charter schools. In contrast, a large percentage of charter school administrators report feeling a total lack of control or minimal control over hiring service providers to students with special education needs, so if services are inadequate or partially inadequate, charters may have difficulty taking ownership for the inadequacy.

Perhaps related to the perceived adequacy of services for students with special education needs is the issue of charter schools planning for compliance with special education laws. Only 29 percent of charter school administrators reported that a specific plan for compliance was part of the initial chartering process. Both charter school administrators and special education directors reiterated this finding during the focus group interviews. Without a specific plan, it is likely difficult to anticipate needed services.

Perhaps the most revealing finding concerns the perceived relationship between the charter schools and the districts. Seventy percent of special education directors reported

a supportive relationship while only ten percent of charter school administrators agreed. This finding sheds light on relationship issues between charter schools and districts while highlighting the lack of awareness of these difficulties.

Based on the data collected and analyzed in this report, the following recommendations are forwarded:

- Improved communication between districts and charter schools, including joint participation in meetings and training sessions and an increased number of visits to the charter schools by district administrators.

- De-emphasize the role of charter schools as the answer to poorly performing traditional public schools. The current perception of the presence of charter schools as an indication of academic failure within a district undermines the relationship between districts and charter schools. The role of charter schools as schools of choice should be emphasized.

- Require charter schools to develop a detailed plan for meeting the needs of children with special education needs as part of the initial chartering process. Provide intensive education, training, and support for the development of this plan.

- Provide the opportunity for interaction between charter school administrators for improved sharing of techniques and strategies.

- Provide the opportunity for interaction between special education administrators to discuss special concerns and strategies for working with charter schools.

- Provide adequate support materials for charter schools. These materials should specify legal requirements and responsibilities of charter schools in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. A handbook and checklist would be most appropriate.

- The role of the Colorado Department of Education should be more visible in providing technical assistance and training for legal compliance.

- Clarify funding issues for all concerned parties, especially the charter schools.

- Use the charter school movement as a means of advocating increased federal funding of special education programs mandated by federal laws.

Further recommendations will be forthcoming as the Colorado Charter School Advisory Committee Reviews and interprets the results of the current study in light of the overall objectives of school choice and the role of charter schools specifically, in the state of Colorado.

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COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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William J. Moloney
Commissioner of Education

Richard G. Elmer
Deputy Commissioner

ACTION REQUESTED IMMEDIATELY

To: Charter School Administrators
Directors of Special Education
BOCES Directors of Special Education

From: William Windler, Assistant Commissioner of Special Services
Lorrie Harkness, Director of Special Education
Subject: Delivery of Services to Students with Disabilities
Date: May 9, 2001

As public schools, charter schools must open their enrollment to any student who lives within the authorizing school district, and must provide appropriate special education services as needed by students with disabilities.

The federal *Charter School Expansion Act of 1998* requires states and local districts to take steps necessary to assure that all charter schools have equal access to federal funds for which they qualify. CDE has now included the requirements of the *Charter Schools Expansion Act of 1998* into the Colorado Department of Education's (CDE's) "Single Assurance Form" LEA's must sign in order to qualify for any federal funds distributed through CDE.

The *1999-2000 Charter Schools Evaluation Study* gathered information on how Colorado charter schools are collaborating with their authorizing districts to serve students with disabilities and the advantages and disadvantages of the approaches they use. The study indicated that the delivery of educational services to students with disabilities presents a financial challenge to LEA's and many charter schools and may raise programmatic issues as well.

To understand the challenges of special education in charter schools, CDE has commissioned Dr. Debora Sheffle, an Associate Professor of Special Education at the University of Northern Colorado, to develop an in-depth questionnaire on the delivery of special education services in Colorado charter schools. The results of this survey will be included in CDE's application for ongoing funding through the Federal Charter Schools Grant Program, the biennial state report to the Office of Special Education Programs and to demonstrate compliance with the federal *Charter Schools Expansion Act of 1998*.

District and BOCES Directors of Special Education and charter school administrators responsible for charter schools serving students with disabilities will be surveyed. Through this survey, CDE staff will also seek to identify model district processes and procedures for charter schools serving students with disabilities. Exemplary practices will then be shared with other districts and charter schools and will assist CDE in providing enhanced technical assistance services to clients.

Please take a moment to respond to the survey identifying you as either a district/BOCES special education director or a charter school administrator, which can be found on CDE's website at http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdechart/chspedsurvey.htm It should take you approximately 15 minutes to complete a survey and return it by the web. If you so choose, the survey may be downloaded in a PDF document and posted directly to Dean Kern, Charter Schools Office, CDE, 201 E. Colfax, Denver, CO 80203 or faxed to 303-866-6637, or emailed to kern_d@cde.state.co.us prior to June1, 2001.

We thank you for your cooperation!

cde *Improving Academic Achievement*

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Charter School / Special Education Survey

Charter School Administrators

Please collaborate with relevant personnel to obtain information not directly accessible to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT: For purposes of tracking, we are asking for identifying information; however, the information collected from this survey will only be shared in aggregate form. No individual identities will be maintained.

**1. Identifying Information:

**Respondent's Name:

**Title:

**1a. Name of Charter School:

**1b. Name of District:

**1c. Location of District Central Office:

**1d. Size of District in Number of Students:

**1e. Number of Charter Schools in your district:

**1f. Date of first charter school in your district: -- *mm/dd/yy*

**1g. Year your charter school opened:

**1h. Grades enrolled in your school:

2. Number of students currently enrolled (as of Oct. 1, 2000):

3. Number of students enrolled for previous years:

Fall, 1999 ☐

Fall, 1998 ☐

Fall, 1997 ☐

4. Which statements best describes the effect of your school's reputation on its attractiveness to parents of children with disabilities:

- ○ The school's reputation makes it very unattractive to parents of children with disabilities
- ○ The school's reputation makes it unattractive to parents of children with disabilities
- ○ The school's reputation makes it neither attractive nor unattractive to parents of children with disabilities
- ○ The school's reputation makes it attractive to parents of children with disabilities
- ○ The school's reputation makes it very attractive to parents of children with disabilities

5. Number of students currently enrolled who were identified with a current Individualized Education Plan (IEP) **upon enrolling in your school (as of Dec. 1, 2000). ☐

6. What percentage of your total student population currently falls in any IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) disability category (of 100%)?

☐ %

7. Number of students enrolled and identified with a current IEP upon entry for previous years:

Fall, 1999 ☐

Fall, 1998 ☐

Fall, 1997 ☐

8. Number of students you have identified with a current IEP **after their enrollment** in you school as of:

Fall, 2000 ☐

Fall, 1999 ☐
Fall, 1998 ☐
Fall, 1997 ☐

9. Of the currently enrolled students with identified disabilities, how many students fall in each of the following categories (based on the primary identifying category)? **(Provide a number for each category)

☐ Perceptual communicative disabilities
☐ Significantly Identifiable Emotional Disorders
☐ Significantly limited intellectual capacity
☐ Multiple disabilities
☐ Speech/language disabilities
☐ Physical disabilities
☐ Hearing or vision disabilities
☐ Preschool children with disabilities
☐ Other

If **"Other"** please describe

☐

10. What percent of your students identified with a disability fall in the following categories?

☐ % Home school general classroom with support < 21% of the time (Mild)

☐ % Home school general classroom with support from 21-60% of the time (Moderate)

☐ % Home school general classroom with support more than 60 % of the time (Severe)

11. Do you have a functioning pre-referral team?

○ Yes ○ No

12. How often has your pre-referral team met in the **current** 2000-2001 school year?

- ○ 1-5 times
- ○ 6-10 times
- ○ 11-15 times
- ○ 16-20 times
- ○ 21-25 times
- ○ 25-35 times
- ○ Other

12a. In an **average** school year?

- ○ 1-5 times
- ○ 6-10 times
- ○ 11-15 times
- ○ 16-20 times
- ○ 21-25 times
- ○ 25-35 times
- ○ Other

If "Other" please specify:

13. What do you do to reach parents of students with disabilities who might want to enroll their child in your school?
(Check all that apply)

- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Community meetings
- ☐ District referrals
- ☐ School literature/brochures
- ☐ Other

**14. Is there any place on your application where a parent would indicate the presence of a disability in his/her child?

○ Yes ○ No

**14a. If so, what is the wording?

14b. How is the information used?
(Check all that apply)

☐ The information is merely used for data collection

☐ A conference is set up with the parent to discuss the ability of the school to meet the child's needs

☐ A conference is set up with the potential teachers (special and general education) to determine how the child's needs can be met

☐ Other (Specify:)

15. How many special education staff serve students with IEP's in your charter school? **(check the boxes that apply)**

Number of FTE's	Teachers	Paraprofessionals	Related Service Providers
.5 or less	☐	☐	☐
.5 - 1.0	☐	☐	☐
1.1 - 1.5	☐	☐	☐
1.6 - 2.0	☐	☐	☐
More than 2.0	☐	☐	☐

15a. Of those, how many FTE's are district hired?

15b. How many FTE's are charter school hired? ☐

15c. What is the average caseload per FTE:

- ○ 1-5
- ○ 6-10
- ○ 11-15
- ○ 16-20
- ○ 20-30
- ○ Other

16. Does your charter specify how students with disabilities will be served?

○ Yes ○ No

16a. What are the specifications?

17. What kind of services do you **currently offer / plan to offer / do not offer and do not plan to offer** for students enrolled in your school who have disabilities? **(Mark one category for each service)**

Currently Offer	Plan to Offer	Do Not Offer / Do Not Plan to Offer	Service
☐	☐	☐	Transportation
☐	☐	☐	Brailling
☐	☐	☐	Sign interpreters
☐	☐	☐	Note takers
☐	☐	☐	Books on tape
☐	☐	☐	Psychological counseling

☐	☐	☐	Educational modifications
☐	☐	☐	Speech/language pathology
☐	☐	☐	Occupational therapy
☐	☐	☐	Social services
☐	☐	☐	Physical therapy
☐	☐	☐	Direct services
☐	☐	☐	Orientation/mobility
☐	☐	☐	Assistive technology
☐	☐	☐	Assessment
☐	☐	☐	English acquisition

**18. How would you describe the relationship of your charter with your school district?

- O Adversarial
- O Somewhat resistant
- O Neutral
- O Supportive

**19. What model do you use to secure special education services for students with disabilities in your charter school?

- O Insurance Model: District provides all services
- O Contracted: Charters are solely responsible and hire teachers or contract for services
- O Combination: District and charter school share responsibility for services
- O Other

If "Other" please specify: [ ]

20. If you use an insurance or combination model, who provides the services?

District	Charter	Contracted	Service

☐	☐	☐	Professional development for special education teachers
☐	☐	☐	Legal counsel
☐	☐	☐	Initial evaluations
☐	☐	☐	IEP Process
☐	☐	☐	Service delivery with students
☐	☐	☐	Provision of related services
☐	☐	☐	Brailling
☐	☐	☐	Sign interpreters
☐	☐	☐	Speech/Language therapy
☐	☐	☐	Occupational therapy
☐	☐	☐	Physical therapy
☐	☐	☐	Assistive technology
☐	☐	☐	Counseling
☐	☐	☐	Orientation / Mobility
☐	☐	☐	Transportion
☐	☐	☐	Other

If you checked "other" in the above table, please describe.

21. If you use the insurance or combination model, what level of control does the charter school have over selection of staff?

- ○ No control
- ○ Minimal
- ○ Partial

○ Total

**22. On average, what percentage of students enrolled in your school can be described as:

[ ] % Gifted
[ ] % Above average learner
[ ] % Average learner
[ ] % Struggling learner
100% Total

**23. As the charter school principal, are you satisfied with the way the special education programs are funded?

○ Very unsatisfied
○ Unsatisfied
○ Somewhat unsatisfied
○ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
○ Somewhat satisfied
○ Satisfied
○ Very satisfied

**24. What is the effect of the funding on the quality of services for students with disabilities?

○ Funding has a strong negative effect on the quality of services
○ Funding has a somewhat negative effect on the quality of services
○ Funding has neither a positive nor negative effect on the quality of services
○ Funding has a somewhat positive effect on the quality of services
○ Funding has a strong positive effect on the quality of services

25. How are students with disabilities currently served in your school? **Check *all that apply* and *estimate percent* in each category:**

This applies to my school	Percent of students	
☐	[ ] %	The general education teacher teaches students with disabilities in the general education classroom
☐	[ ] %	The child is pulled out for a portion of the day for small group instruction
☐	[ ] %	The child is pulled out for a portion of the day for one-to-one instruction
☐	[ ] %	The child is matched with a paraprofessional who helps him/her in the classroom
☐	[ ] %	A special education teacher consults with the general education teacher regarding the learning needs of the child
☐	[ ] %	The special education and regular education teachers team teach
☐	[ ] %	Other [ ]

26. Other comments to describe delivery of services to students with disabilities in your charter school?

[ ]

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r additional information, E-Mail: kern_d@cde.state.co.us

Colorado Department of Education

Charter School / Special Education Survey

Special Education Directors

CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT: For purposes of tracking, we are asking for identifying information; however, the information collected from this survey v only be shared in aggregate form. No individual identities will be maintained.

**1. Identifying Information:

**Respondent's Name:

**Title:

**1a. Name of District:

**1b. Location of District Central Office:

**1c. Size of District in Number of Students:

**1d. Number of Charter Schools in your district:

**1e. Date of first charter school in your district: -- *mm/dd/yy*

2. On a per pupil basis (PPR), what percentage of your district's education funding i passing directly to charter schools in your district this fiscal year? If you don't know the answer to this question, someone in your business office should know (chief financial officer).

○ 95-96%

○ 97-98%
○ 99-100%
○ 101-102%
○ 103-105%
○ Other

If "**Other**" please describe

**3. Do you forward Federal IDEA funds to charter schools in your district?

○ Yes ○ No

**3a. If yes, in what form?

☐ Cash sent to the charter schools
☐ Services specifically for the charter schools
☐ Monies are pooled for use by high need students in any school in the district
☐ Other (Describe)

**4. Are state special education funds passed through to your charter schools?

○ Yes ○ No

**4a. If yes, how are the amounts determined?

☐ Based on an in-year Dec. 1 head count by school
☐ Based on the prior year Dec. 1 head count by school
☐ By some other metric

If by some other metric please **Specify:**

**5. How do you decide how much to charge per pupil for special education services In charter schools?

○ Total district special education budget minus federal contribution divided by number of students in the district

○ Total district special education budget plus:

☐ Title I funds

☐ Federal support for school lunches

☐ Other (list below)

○ Other (Describe below)

6. Does the special education funding vary from charter school to charter school within your district?

○ Yes ○ No

6a.if so what is the: minimum amount of funding ☐

maximum amount of funding ☐

**7. Are special education <u>administrative costs</u> included in the 5% funding withheld from the per pupil revenues (<u>PPR</u>)?

○ Yes ○ No

8. Do you offer specialized <u>technical assistance</u> for charters in the area of special education?

○ Yes ○ No

8a. If so, in what areas? **(Check *all that apply*)**

- ☐ IEP Development
- ☐ Discipline
- ☐ Manifestation hearings
- ☐ Legal compliance
- ☐ Other

9. How many charter schools in your district participate in the insurance model (i.e. the district provides specified services) to provide services to students with disabilities?

- ○ All
- ○ None
- ○ Not all, but some (indicate number: [ ])

9a. Is their participation voluntary or mandatory?

- ○ Mandatory
- ○ Voluntary

**10. How much do you charge the charter schools on a per pupil basis given insurance model participation?

- ○ $100-199
- ○ $200-299
- ○ $300-399
- ○ $400-499
- ○ $500-599
- ○ Other

If "Other" please specify: [ ]

11. What services related to students with disabilities are covered by insurance model participation? (**Check *all that apply***)

- ☐ Professional development for special education teachers

- ☐ Legal counsel
- ☐ Initial evaluations
- ☐ Intervention
- ☐ IEP process
- ☐ Service delivery
- ☐ Hiring a SPED teacher
- ☐ Hiring an intinerant teacher
- ☐ Related services
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Day Treatment placements
- ☐ Residential Treatment placements
- ☐ Other (Specify: _____)

12. How many charter schools in your district participate in a model whereby they contract for their own services?

- ○ All
- ○ None
- ○ Not all, but some (indicate number: _____)

13. How many charter schools in your district participate in a combination of the insurance and contracting models?

- ○ All
- ○ None
- ○ Not all, but some (indicate number: _____)

14. If you use the insurance or combination model, what level of control does the charter school have over selection of special education staff?

- ○ Total
- ○ Partial
- ○ Minimal
- ○ No Control

**15. If your charters do not participate in the insurance model but instead contract for services for delivery of special education for students with disabilities, which of the

following is true:

- ○ Your charter schools contract partially with your district for services
- ○ Your charter schools contract fully with your district for services
- ○ Your charter schools contract partially with outside private providers for services
- ○ Your charter schools contract partially with outside private providers for services

16. Hypothetically, if a charter school in your district enrolls a high needs child, how is this handled?

- ○ Charter school sustains the cost
- ○ Charter school uses pooled monies from the district to address the child's needs in the charter school
- ○ Placement is arranged in an appropriate district program outside the charter school
- ○ Other (Describe below)

17. Are the needs of students with disabilities in charter schools in your district being adequately met?

- ○ Totally Inadequate
- ○ Inadequate
- ○ Somewhat Inadequate
- ○ Somewhat Adequate
- ○ Adequate
- ○ Totally Adequate

18. How do you first become aware of a problem in special education compliance in one of your charters?
(**Check *all that apply***)

- ☐ Regular meetings with staff
- ☐ Mediation/Due Process request from parent
- ☐ Complaint from parent
- ☐ Other

19. How do you address issues of non-compliance relative to special education in one of your charter schools, should the situation arise? **(Check *all that apply*)

- ☐ Consulting from outside the district
- ☐ Educational support for charter school staff
- ☐ Reprimand (such as probationary status or other)
- ☐ Other

20. Is documentation of compliance with special education laws and regulations part of the charter renewal process in your district?

- ○ Initial Charter
- ○ Charter Renewal

21. If documentation of compliance is part of the charter renewal process, is it:

- ○ explicitly stated as part of the process
- ○ embedded and implicit in a general question regarding the quality of services

**22. Are you involved in the charter school renewal process?

○ Yes ○ No

22a. If you are involved, do you review the part of the renewal application which deals with compliance with laws governing special education?

○ Yes ○ No

**23. How would you describe your relationship with the charter schools in your district?

- O Supportive
- O Neutral
- O Resistant
- O Adversarial

**24. Are you satisfied with the way the special education programs are funded in the charter schools in your district?

- O Totally unsatisfied
- O Unsatisfied
- O Somewhat unsatisfied
- O Somewhat satisfied
- O Satisfied
- O Very satisfied

25. Other comments to describe delivery of services to students with disabilities at charter schools within your district?

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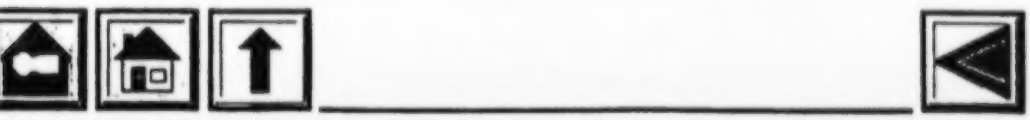
For additional information, E-Mail: kern_d@cde.state.co.us



COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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William J. Moloney
Commissioner of Education

Richard G. Elmer
Deputy Commissioner

MEMO

To: Directors of Special Education
BOCES Directors of Special Education
Charter School Administrators
From: William Windler, Assistant Commissioner of Special Services
Lorrie Harkness, Director of Special Education
Subject: Delivery of Services to Students with Disabilities
Date: May 14, 2001

You are invited to attend a focus group discussing charter schools serving students with disabilities. To understand the challenges of special education in charter schools, CDE has commissioned Dr. Debora Sheffle, an Associate Professor of Special Education at the University of Northern Colorado, to conduct a statewide survey on this issue. As part of her survey, Dr. Sheffle will be conducting two focus groups, May 30 & 31. District and BOCES Directors of Special Education and charter school administrators responsible for charter schools serving students with disabilities are invited to participate.

The *1999-2000 Charter Schools Evaluation Study* gathered information on how Colorado charter schools are collaborating with their authorizing districts to serve students with disabilities and the advantages and disadvantages of the approaches they use. The study indicated that the delivery of educational services to students with disabilities presents a financial challenge to LEA's and many charter schools and may raise programmatic issues as well. The goals of these focus groups are:

- To identify model district processes and procedures for the delivery of special education services in charter schools;
- Gather exemplary practices of districts and charter schools serving students with disabilities; and
- Assist CDE in providing enhanced technical assistance services to clients.

The focus group meetings will be:

May 30:	Colorado Springs District 11 NikolaTesla Ed. Opportunity Center 2560 International Circle Colorado Springs	**May 31:**	St. Vrain Valley School District Educational Service Center 395 S. Pratt Pkwy Longmont, CO
Room:	110-111	**Room:**	Board Room
Morning 9-11:	Charter School Administrators	**Morning 9-11:**	Charter School Administrators
Afternoon 1-3:	BOCES/District Special Ed Administrators	**Afternoon 1-3:**	BOCES/District Special Ed Administrators

We encourage your participation in either of these focus groups. Please take a moment to RSVP your attendance directly to Tina Tamayo, CDE, (303) 866-6705 or email to Tamayo_T@cde.state.co.us For further information, please contact Dean Kern, Charter Schools Office, CDE, 201 E. Colfax, Denver, CO 80203 or fax 303-866-6637, or email kern_d@cde.state.co.us

We look forward to your participation!

cde *Improving Academic Achievement*

FOCUS GROUP AGENDA

(Power Point Frames):

1. Welcome
    - Colorado Department of Education Focus Group
    - Topic: Charter Schools and Special Needs Students
2. Ground Rules
    - Anonymous: None of your comments will be attributed to you individually. Please use your assigned number when making comments and referring to other participants.
    - Candid: We want honest, constructive information.
    - Confidential: We will provide information from this focus group only to CDE. Please do not share other's comments outside of this room.
    - Productive: Your comments will be the basis for change.
3. Impressions
    - Identify yourself as a Special Education Director or Charter School Principal (or other)
    - Write one word or phrase to describe your impression of charter school's reaction to children with special education needs.
    - Write a number from 1 to 5 (1=lowest; 5=highest) to describe your satisfaction with the charter schools in meeting the needs of special needs children
4. What are the primary issues surrounding serving students with disabilities in charter schools?
5. What is your opinion of the quality of special education services?
    - (Special Ed Directors) In charter schools in your district.
    - (Charter School Principals) In your charter school
6. What state and local policies and procedures encourage or hinder the provision of special education services?
    - (Special Ed Directors) In charter schools in your district.
    - (Charter School Principals) In your charter school.
7. What is a best practice model representing an optimal relationship between a school district and a charter school? Describe the characteristics of this working relationship.
8. How is the responsibility for serving the needs of students with disabilities in your charter school(s) shared between the district and the charter school? Who has responsibility for what?
9. Roundtable
    - Passing a sheet of paper rapidly from one person to another, please jot down all the relevant strengths and weaknesses of the relationship between charter schools and children with special education needs.

10. Ranking
    - Working as a team, rank-order the strengths you identified, with the most important ones at the top of your list.
    - Please rank-order the weaknesses with the most troubling weaknesses at the top of your list.
11. What types of technical assistance are needed to assist charter schools in being successful in serving students with disabilities?
    - Where do/ should the resources for this assistance come?
    - How is this technical assistance/ staff development being delivered?
    - Is current technical assistance and staff development for charter schools adequate?
12. Funding and Budget Issues
    - How does your district finance its charter schools?
    - What formulas are being used?
    - How does your charter school fund services and related costs for students with disabilities?
13. If you could change one practice or send one message to a
    - Special Education Director
    - Charter School Principal
    - Colorado Department of Education
    - Legislator
    - Governor
14. What would it be?
15. Is there anything else about the relationship between Charter Schools and children with special education needs that you'd like to discuss?
16. Thanks for Participating!

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